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ABSTRACT

This report addresses the expanding role that schools play in a child's everyday life and presents three creative initiatives in Seattle, Washington, designed to reconnect schools with their surrounding communities and help schools meet their growing role as an extended family. The three elementary school case studies, which each address a different aspect of community life, offer insights and approaches that other communities can use to give children a more vibrant daily connection with their communities. These initiatives illustrate the value of parents, grandparents, and others in reconnecting school environments with their communities and the importance of the children's participation in the process. (GR)

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Reconnecting Community and School: Initiatives to Expand Children's Environments

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Reconnecting Community and School: Initiatives to Expand Children's Environments

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ABSTRACT

Children need to learn from their environments, and school environments play a significant role in a child's everyday life. Schools are taking on an even greater role in the extent of time a child spends there, as working parents place them in early morning and after-school programs. If those environments are sterile and isolated, there is little opportunity for children to sense their connection to the natural and social community around them. Creative initiatives are underway in metropolitan Seattle, Washington, which hold potential to reconnect the schools with, and engage children in, the surrounding community. Three such initiatives, each of which addresses a different aspect of community life, are presented. These three case studies offer insights and approaches which we believe may be used in other communities to give children a more vibrant, daily connection with their communities.

INTRODUCTION

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Schools and their surroundings are a critical environment for children to learn about their community. Their experiences in getting to and from school, and in exploring the school site and surroundings, suggest how children find meaning and attachment in a community. Many vocalize the popular saying, "It takes a whole village (community) to raise a child." In Seattle, Washington, however, a city of half a million people that increases to well over 2 million along the I-S Corridor, what and where is the **village**?

Schools historically have been the center of the local community or village. Citizens of rural American towns erected modest buildings through local donations and volunteers and usually located them at its crossroads. Along with the local church, the school became the center for communal gatherings. Walking to and from school, children experienced the man made and natural environments that were a part of their every day lives. After the turn of the century however, urban growth along with improved roadways and modes of transportation changed the way that we relate to our surroundings. Students spent more time in school, and educational curriculum began to promote learning within the classroom. Today, more children from all ethnic and cultural backgrounds are entering school, graduating and proceeding to college without ever leaving the educational institution except for occasional field trips and summer breaks. The noted nineteenth century educator philosopher John Dewey in his lecture series *The School and Society* lamented, "No number of object-lessons, got up as object lessons for the sake of giving information, can afford even the shadow of a substitute for acquaintance with the plants and animals of the farm and garden acquired through actual living among them and caring for them."

Today, schools in the United States physically isolate themselves from the community with fenced play fields and parking areas separating the school building from neighboring uses. Parents concerned about their children's safety naturally caution them to be careful when confronting strangers and traveling alone or at night. A generation detached from the community where they will eventually live and work is an unacceptable situation. Society must learn to re-engage all the elements of the community, including schools, in order to allow, as a noted educator, John Abbott says, "an essential component" in our children's education. In his publication entitled *Learning Makes Sense: Recreating Education for a changing future*. Mr. Abbott continues, "Safe streets and stimulating classrooms are of equal significance in a Learning Community."

Children and adults must be familiar with their surroundings and regain a sense of community. People and places that are "known" are no longer meaningless. Police departments are building successful relationships within the neighborhoods that they serve by reinstating foot patrols. Children should be encouraged to explore the environment outside the school buildings and safely discover the spirit of their "village". The good news is that there are indications of some progress. In his book *Schools That Work*, educator George Wood describes the routine of one teacher:

> "It must be a Wednesday afternoon in Amesville, because there goes Marcia Burchby and her band of six-year-olds on yet another walk around town. Today they are out doing an excavation, looking for whatever is down there in conjunction with their theme on dinosaurs. On other Wednesdays (Thursdays in case of rain) you can find them counting the number and types of trees, mapping streets, surveying housing types, planting bulbs or a section of a garden, picking flowers, visiting sheep or horses, searching gravel in neighborhood driveways for fossils (they find dozens), or. if you catch them at the end of their travels on a sunny spring day, just rolling down the hill in Marcia's backyard beside the school."

Wood promotes (like Dewey a hundred years earlier) the idea that "real experiences" outside the classroom allow both teacher and student "a new world of learning." We must change our traditional beliefs about teaching and curriculum and utilize what is readily available to us on a regular basis. This "rethinking" does take some effort however. It embraces our American heritage or democratic ideals of becoming "involved" - overcoming, as Wood says, "the bureaucratization and standardization" of a typical school routine, as well as rethinking how the community may interact with school. The national rhetoric for "local control" by both school districts (from the state) and school communities in the form of "site councils" is an indication that society may be ready for a change.

Many schools in the Puget Sound area are embracing social services in the forms of parenting classes, before and after school daycare, and English as a Second Language classes; and once again they are becoming a center for community gatherings. Parents and retirees are encouraged to volunteer their time and services. Redmond Elementary School (east of Seattle) encourages business men and women to have lunch with an elementary school child one day a week. They also offer a "night out" child care service that allows parents to go on a late evening date while their children "camp out" on the school grounds. The local Chamber of Commerce or business organization also prepares and serves community banquets at the school to raise funds for school projects.

School gymnasiums, multi-purpose rooms and libraries are currently designed and constructed for after school and weekend community use. As budgets tighten, city parks and recreation departments increasingly are coordinating their efforts to share or build parks adjacent to local schools so that the school and the community may benefit from the combined open spaces. Societal, environmental, economic and educational concerns are generating proactive as well as reactive proposals to marry communities and schools.

Creative initiatives are underway in metropolitan Seattle, Washington, which hold potential to reconnect the schools with, and engage children in, the surrounding community. Three such initiatives, each of which addresses a different aspect of community life and draws upon different resources, are presented. These three case studies

offer insights and approaches which we believe may be used in other communities to give children a more vibrant, daily connection with their communities.

ENVISIONING SCHOOL AS COMMUNITY'S CENTER: DRAWING FROM IDENTITY, SITE, AND SURROUNDINGS

The development of a shared community and school site, surrounded by neighborhoods, businesses, and civic uses, holds tremendous potential for children to experience community life each day. While new school facilities and sites may be developed to share resources with the community, these facilities frequently are remote from the heart of a community. Older schools, more central to existing neighborhoods and other uses, need to be re-examined for ways in which the facilities, both structure and site, may support community activities to enhance the interaction of children with other members and aspects of their community. Additionally, the surroundings of such schools need to be utilized through curriculum, such that learning opportunities are experienced beyond the immediate school site. The conditions and planning process undertaken for Redmond Elementary School offer insights for adapting a school site as a community's center, and for expanding the concept of school beyond the immediate site.

Redmond Elementary School

context and process

In Redmond, Washington, a new elementary school was slated to replace the existing school nestled in the heart of its downtown. The historic school's future became a subject of community interest, since it served four generations of citizens and was a focus for community events. Rather than remove the historic school, it was considered for potential use as a civic center. The new school would share this site - the largest publicly owned property in Redmond's downtown - and could help to create a learning and interactive center for all members of the community.

Together, the City of Redmond and the Lake Washington School District have taken steps to plan for such a community center. Redmond's City Council approved a "Statement of Interest" in June 1995, to participate with the school district in exploring future uses for the historic school and the site. Policies within the City's recently adopted Comprehensive Plan supported initiatives for protecting "historically and culturally significant buildings" in the rapidly growing community; for coordinating the development of park and recreation facilities with local school facilities; and for creating a "balanced system of recreational opportunities for all ages by providing a community center or centers" with programs to include a youth or teen center, meeting rooms, and social services. In December 1995, the City Council voted to lease the historic school building for civic uses.

While an architecture firm had been hired to design the new school, planning of the entire

site, and its potentials for the school and community, was not resolved. The University of Washington Center for Architecture and Education recognized this special opportunity, and offered to assist the School District through a community-based process of envisioning the site's future. The Center formed a team of faculty and students from the College of Architecture and Urban Planning and the College of Education, including Urban Planning Associate Professor Ron Kasprisin; Jerry Bamburg, Director of the Center for Effective Schools, Education Professor Fran Hunkins, and the authors of this article.

As an interdisciplinary team, we sought opportunities inherent in the site, its buildings, and its surroundings which would foster an enriching and interactive environment for schoolchildren and citizens. We identified several apparent opportunities on the site and with the surrounding land uses, but needed these and other ideas needed to be expressed and embraced by those who could implement them. A workshop was planned which would bring together varied representatives of the school, the city, and civic groups. This consensus-based approach, we believed, would increase the commitment to and realization of proposals. The results were assembled into an illustrated "newspaper" which could be used by the school district and community for distribution and decision-making.

In the spring of 1996, we gathered information and conducted interviews as reference materials for a day-long visioning workshop. Ron Kasprisin coordinated the workshop on the school site. Breaking into small groups with the team, a spectrum of 20 community and school representatives walked the site; viewed the visual and physical character and connections with its immediate surroundings; and shared their dreams of potential activities. Each small group then presented their ideas to the others. A process of "voting" on the three most appealing activities, noting who would use them, identified a prioritization of potential activities. The results were tabulated during the workshop and visually represented on a room- sized matrix, allowing time for participants to discuss those activities which held the greatest common value.

All workshop participants recognized the potential of this site as part of a larger community network for schoolchildren and citizens. The dynamics of the workshop and cross-section of participants accomplished several objectives, identifying:

- the variety of existing programs and activities which draw the community to the school for recreation and social services
- how teachers currently use the site and surrounding destinations with their students:
- existing elements on-site that are needed, that are not used, and that create conflicts:
- desired activities and users for the site, old and new school buildings. and surroundings; and
- potential sponsors, organizations, and/or partnerships for realizing proposed changes.

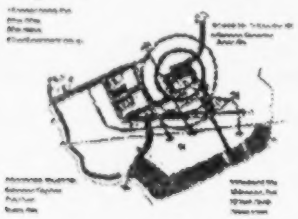
Armed with this information, the team undertook a design charrette (a short, intense

discussion and design process,) to develop visual and text representations of how the school site may be designed and connect with its surroundings. Using the priority activities, site conditions, buildings, and surroundings as guides, two conceptual plans were articulated for the site: "play fields and plaza" and "parks and habitats". In each plan, spaces are dedicated to organized sports, gardens and habitat, an amphitheatre, a courtyard or plaza, and parking. The "play fields and plaza" option illustrates how the site could accommodate multiple play fields for school and community use, and presents a large common plaza to unite the school and community buildings. The plaza is envisioned as a focus of community-wide events. By contrast, "parks and habitats" offers fewer play fields while introducing a picnic area among gardens and a tree nursery, an amphitheatre nestled in the wooded hillside, a designed pond for habitat and interpretive study. Gardens and small courtyards create more intimate settings between the two buildings. Connections to surrounding parks and civic functions are highlighted in both concepts.

Given these contrasting concepts for the site, it is hoped that citizens of Redmond - young and old - will consider and discuss which concept, or a hybrid of the two, is most valued. Such awareness-building is intended to foster community participation in realizing the site's potentials over time.

Following the publication of the newspaper, the City and School District have refocussed their energies on the development of the structures. Site elements immediate to the structures are receiving more immediate attention and commitment. The City's Design Review Board has approved the proposal for a "kinder-garden" - a planting area for school children to design and nurture - be dedicated to a prominent corner of the site. A plaza will be developed between the two buildings which will feature planters maintained by the students. The school plans to solicit citizen sponsorship of bricks for the plaza, where sponsors would have messages engraved in the bricks. The School District's facilities planner notes that plans for the remainder of the site will receive more attention following the development of the new school.

insights



While some conditions of this case study are unique, insights regarding its context, process, and potential outcomes may be applied elsewhere. Lessons in fostering a school site as a community's center stem from enriching the site's inherent qualities and connections with its surrounding community; creating an inclusive process for envisioning the site's future; and maintaining momentum in articulating a vision and taking initiatives to realize it.

1. ***enrich site features and foster interaction***

The partnering of city and school facilities creates opportunities for children to interact with others through learning on the school site, as well as in the surrounding community. While limited use had been made of the site and a nearby park in the past, teachers could use proposed site features such as habitat, gardens, and courtyards for science experiments, art projects, reading spaces, mathematics, and history. Nearby civic facilities and businesses could be visited for a hands-on application of curriculum.

Currently, a "lunch buddy" program pairs students with a community member, to share lunch together on a regular basis. Similar programs could be initiated for gardening projects, artwork for the plaza, and performing and commitment. The City's Design Review Board has apprarts to take advantage of the historic school and proposed outdoor amphitheatre. Students from other schools, varied professionals, as well as members of cultural and arts organizations could take part in such projects. An immediate connection with adjacent elderly neighbors may exist in soliciting their help with the children's garden.

2. ***undertake inclusive process to identify desired activities and features***

The workshop conducted at Redmond Elementary School brought together city leaders, school district administrators and teachers, leaders of community and business organizations, student parents, and other citizens to brainstorm on the site's potentials. This exploratory approach encouraged the sharing of new ideas, new resources for implementation, and a deeper appreciation for the value of this site. By coming together, these people developed a sense of commitment to activities which a majority supported.

Unfortunately, those not represented which most deserved a voice in this workshop was the children. Initiatives to elicit student involvement need to be undertaken as the design options are considered and developed. Their participation in articulating the vision for their school site encourages a greater sense of connection with and role within their community.

3. ***maintain momentum in articulating a vision and taking initiatives to realize it***
Nearly a year has passed since the workshop was held for articulating the school site's potentials. As a cooperative undertaking by the School District and the City, aspects of politics, budgets, and procedures have slowed the process. The focus also has shifted towards the construction of the new school, relocation of the existing student body, and renovation and dedication of space within the old school. This detracts from the intended development of a consensus-based vision for the entire site.

Yet some initiatives are underway to implement popular features of the site, including a central plaza with community sponsorship for the pavers and a student-run "kindergarden". These initiatives may help to raise interest and awareness in how the rest of the site may be developed over time, provided a person or group maintains that comprehensive view and provides the leadership to maintain the process.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS: NON-PROFIT CONNECTS SCHOOLCHILDREN WITH NATURE AND NEIGHBORS

Many existing schools lack the space on-site to provide for natural habitat or community activities. Yet adjacent or nearby public parcels may hold such potential to connect children with the nature and their neighbors. Innovative partnerships, involving non-profit organizations, the school, and city agencies, can lead to win-win situations for school children, neighbors, and the environment.

Dearborn Elementary School

context and process

The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a non-profit corporation, is undertaking a promising initiative for the children of an elementary school in central Seattle. In 1994, TPL started its "Green Cities Initiative" to focus on securing land within American cities for parks and open space, and empowering neighborhood groups in the process. The Seattle office of TPL was approached by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation to assist in acquiring a 1 1/2 acre wooded parcel adjacent to an existing neighborhood park. This parcel also bordered Dearborn Elementary School, and TPL staff recognized an opportunity to expand the parcel's role for environmental education and stewardship. As TPL secured the land, it also identified programs which would make this site meaningful to and safe for the children of Dearborn Elementary and its neighbors. Dearborn Elementary School values opportunities for outdoor learning. The school had begun a gardening program in the 1994-95 school year with success, and had discussed establishing native plant zones on site with a forestry professional. When TPL staff met with the school's principal and faculty to discuss the potential of using the adjacent wooded parcel for environmental education, the proposal was welcomed. The school's principal wished to create a model educational program focusing on science and the environment. With TPL, an "alliance" of organizations and school leaders formed to determine how to integrate environmental education with existing curriculum and make the site usable. This "Alliance for Education" met regularly to identify opportunities and expand resources. Three aspects of a model curriculum were identified are underway for the 1996-97 school year: environmental science, integration with art and humanities, and a mentoring program involving older students.

The Washington Forest Products Association, through its Project Learning Tree program,

provided teacher training and curriculum to implement forest study. TPL notes this program is "widely recognized as the fullest environmental education curriculum in Washington state." Representatives continue to participate in Alliance meetings and curriculum development. Students are learning to identify native and invasive plant species and understand natural systems, as well as appreciate how Native Americans may have used the site's resources. Through formal classes, students experience the site approximately twice a week.

To bring the forest alive through the arts, a documentary play developed by the students is envisioned. Students would work with a theatre artist to relate the concepts and discoveries of the environment through story, song, movement, and the creation of stage props. While TPL is pursuing grants to fund this program, students and teachers are using the site as inspiration for poetry composition and visual arts. Through state and city funded arts grants, the school has an artist-in-residence working with students. This artist is helping the students to create a permanent mural in February 1997, with references to the forest.

The mentoring program is envisioned to draw upon college students and high school students. Such students would work with the elementary students, sharing expertise and acting as role models, while gaining independent study credits. Currently, high school students from a nearby school are taking part in the forest studies and site clean-ups. Students from a middle school also may participate in the future.

The wooded site presents tangible challenges for access and use, however. Invasive plants and debris were targeted for a volunteer clean-up effort on Earth Day 1996. TPL staff worked with school children, teachers, and City Parks and Recreation staff in what became several clean-up sessions. A path that once connected the school with the neighborhood was re- established, and made wider for greater visibility and safety.

The transformation of the woodland into habitat is viewed as a valuable opportunity to foster a sense of stewardship in the students. The removal of invasive species, such as blackberry, continues each Thursday after school, as children work with a horticulturist from the Parks and Recreation Department. Each grade cares for a portion of the site. High school students assist in the weekly clean-ups. Students from the nearby middle school and high school are intended to play a continued role in studying and caring for the site. In this way, current students at Dearborn Elementary will maintain a lasting connection with the site even after they progress to the other schools.

The Alliance for Education continues meeting regularly to make the site safe and usable for the students and surrounding neighborhood. TPL secured a donor to fund the design of a gathering space, more extensive path system, and native plant zones, as well as the plants . This effort will involve the children of Dearborn Elementary, as well as high

school students and parents. A landscape architect has been retained to plan these spaces and determine the native plant zones. Through a design charrette, high school students will assist the landscape architect in the design, while the Dearborn students and parents identify particular elements needed and critique the proposal. The Dearborn students and student mentors will help with the planting in late 1997.

For the long-term stewardship of this open space, the Alliance is beginning a process of including neighborhood residents, particularly students' parents. The proposed plan for site features and plantings will be presented to the school's PTA and the neighborhood's Community Council. The Alliance views this site as a school and community resource, which the school children may teach others of the forest's values.

insights

Through the resources and initiatives of the Trust for Public Land, Dearborn Elementary School and the City Parks and Recreation Department, and contributions of others, a previously neglected site holds tremendous potential for reclamation, use, and on-going stewardship. The goals of TPL's Green Cities Initiative were targeted in this case to empower children' to help them experience and grow to understand natural systems in their own "backyard" on a daily basis. These efforts also benefit the City and surrounding neighborhood by adding to and enhancing its open space network. What seems most apparent in the successes of this case study, and may be applied elsewhere, includes: partnering of groups and resources, applying hands-on experiences of the site to varied studies, and a fostering of a broad-based sense of stewardship.

1. **partner resources**

   Through TPL's partnering with Dearborn Elementary School, the wooded parcel that the Parks and Recreation Department sought for open space took on added meaning. While TPL's expertise and resources provided for the acquisition and transfer of the land, staff also recognized the educational potential of the site. An alliance of interested groups grew to make the site usable and articulate how the children may learn from it. Varied grants and donors have been pursued to improve the site and incorporate the arts in the curriculum. One approach, the mentoring program, partners the knowledge and abilities of high school students with the Dearborn Elementary students in studying and improving the site.

2. **apply hands-on experiences to varied studies**

   The three programs of study - science, arts, and mentoring - integrate existing curriculum with this site, such that the site becomes an outdoor laboratory. Through daily experiences on the site, children may develop a better understanding of natural systems. These experiences help to make certain concepts and terms tangible and

meaningful. Students envision how Native Americans used the plant species, write about what they find and identify, compose poetry, and create a mural. The proposed application of student findings in a self-determined play integrates science, language, visual art, and music in a creative and powerful way. The mentoring program offers opportunities for more personal interaction and self-directed study of the site, for both elementary and older students.

3. **foster broad-based sense of stewardship**

   Through the partnering of non-profit, school, and city agency resources, the restoration of the forest as a valuable habitat and a valued place in the children's daily lives is taking place. Their curriculum offers children frequent experiences in the forest, and the forest path to the neighborhood offers daily access through it. The students' efforts in clean-up parties and plantings fosters a sense of pride and a vested interest in the woodland's future. Through the mentoring program, other students may come to care for the land, and the current elementary students will be able to continue caring for it over the years. The long-term involvement of the neighborhood in using the site, particularly parents of the schoolchildren, will help to ensure that the site is safe, well-used, and well-loved.

TAKING PART IN THE PROCESS: RECLAIMING A SITE FOR DISCOVERY AND PLAY

While physical settings are needed to expand children's involvement in their communities, the process of developing those settings holds tremendous potential for children. Whenever possible, children should be integral to this process. Their involvement in identifying opportunities, planning for changes, and implementing the plans gives children insights and a sense of value in their community. The children's participation often results in more creative and engaging places for all.

Normandy Park Academy Montessori School

context and process

Tucked behind a State Division of Social Services parking lot, just off a commercial strip, the Normandy Park Academy Montessori School is a fish out of water. The building appears as a chalet above rolling fields of parked cars, with trees filtering multi-family housing behind it. With over 100 students between the ages of five and nine, the school desperately lacks open space for outdoor activities. A narrow strip of land along the school's back side contains some play structures, a basketball hoop, and a modified "climbing wall".

Hugh Wallenfels, the school's headmaster, began to look beyond the walls of the school. A secluded, vacant area behind the adjacent bowling alley bordered one edge of the school's

outdoor play area. This land was frequented by drug users, who left needles and other trash behind. Wooded slopes define three sides of the parcel, and an open flat area meets the back of the bowling alley. Wallenfels viewed this site an opportunity for the open space needed by the children, while also improving the safety and conditions of the neighborhood. In the spring of 1996, he met with the caring for it over the years. The long-term inowners of the bowling alley, who owned the parcel. They welcomed his proposal for reclaiming the site for the children.

Originally envisioned as a play field, Wallenfels' intentions shifted after hearing the landscape architect Robin Moore describe "adventure playgrounds" at a conference. Such playgrounds are a constant source of discovery and creativity, since they are built primarily by the children who use them. This type of playground meshed well with the Montessori curriculum, and suggested the site also serve as a "classroom" for natural habitat.

Encouraged by Robin Moore, Mr. Wallenfels contacted the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Washington for assistance. He met with Assistant Professor Julie Johnson in the summer of 1996. We discussed how landscape architecture students could help generate design ideas for the site in an exploratory process. The opportunity seemed well- suited to the introductory site planning studio offered that fall which I co- taught, and was incorporated into the curriculum.

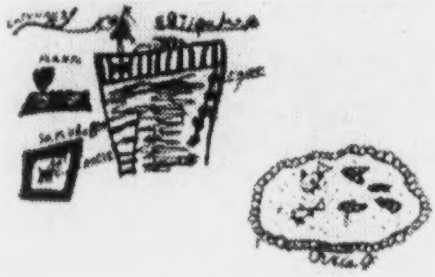
A central goal for transforming the site was to involve the Montessori students as much as possible, as well as their parents. This goal draws from the Montessori teaching philosophy, and gave the landscape architecture students valuable experience in a participatory design process. The transformation got underway during the summer, as the children helped clean up the site with parents and staff.

In October 1996, a class of 27 landscape architecture students and their professors made two visits to the school. On the first visit, the class studied the site's features and surroundings, and discussed the project with Mr. Wallenfels. The following week, the class returned to meet in small groups with the Montessori students, teachers, and some parents to identify desired features and activities. The landscape architecture students received some preparation in drawing out the children's ideas, and came with paper and markers. The most dramatic ideas surfaced not on paper, however, but on the site. With a break in the rain, everyone went out to explore the site. The children delighted in crossing the pools of water, climbing up the wooded slopes, and inspecting plants.

The landscape architecture students returned to their design studio to formalize their analysis of the site and the potential activities, or program. In consolidating the ideas expressed by children, teachers, and parents, seven broad categories of spaces surfaced: nature/habitat, water features, open lawn, adventure/structure play, self-building space, gathering/sitting areas, and secret spaces. Using these spaces, and their understanding of

the site, each student developed a concept, or theme, for their design. They gave form and scale to their designs through drawings.

As the clients for the project, a group of Montessori students visited the studio with Mr. Wallenfels and two parents to student's review the designs in progress. The children got a first-hand look at how a designer works, what the environment is like, and how their ideas were incorporated into plans for the site. They talked with the landscape architecture students, and gave some valuable critiques. The landscape architecture later presented their finalized designs to Mr. Wallenfels, parents of the Montessori students, and University faculty in a formal review session. Copies of each student's design drawings were made and displayed at the school for the children to review and discuss.



The 27 conceptual designs for this site have given the Montessori school a sense of what's possible, and the process to develop one masterplan gets underway in early 1997. While the children will continue to take part in the design process, they also will participate in fundraising. Mr. Wallenfels has begun contacting adjacent businesses for potential sponsorship. The native plants group at a local community college was contacted and is willing to help with plantings. Students' parents also are helping: an engineer worked with students to measure and map the site, a contractor will assist with earthmoving, and others are anticipated to help with construction. Over the summer, the children will help build some aspects of the final design, so that they may continue to realize their hopes in creating a place for discovery and play. Ultimately, Mr. Wallenfels hopes this site could be shared with other children in the community, perhaps through special weekend programs.

insights

While illustrating similarities with the creation of Dearborn Elementary School's urban forest, this case demonstrates unique arrangements in securing open space, and involving the children in all aspects of the site's transformation. Insights here may prove useful to other schools sited in urban or suburban contexts.

1. ***seek win-win opportunities with neighbors***

   Mr. Wallenfels identified a site that needed attention and care. The criminal activity was a safety problem for all in the area, and the property owners welcomed the opportunity to see the site improved. The school's efforts gained coverage in the local newspaper, and gave a positive attribution to the owners and their bowling alley. In cleaning up the site, the drug users were forced to go elsewhere, making the area safer for the children and surrounding businesses. These businesses may recognize

this value by helping to make the site an active part of the school rather than allow it to return to derelicts.

2. ***identify positive learning opportunities for engaging others***

   To develop the site, Mr. Wallenfels involved others who would value learning through participation in the process. The landscape architecture students gained valuable experience in analyzing the site and working with the schoolchildren and others. Under the direction of their professors, the students' design process enabled the Montessori students, parents, and teachers to discover what was possible on the site, and how it could become a unified, designed place. Parents will take part in constructing site features, sharing their expertise with others. The involvement of students from the local community college in providing and helping to plant native plants also offers learning experiences.

3. ***involve children through all aspects of site transformation***
   The Montessori children have played an active role throughout the transformation of this site, and will continue to do so. Their experiences help give them a sense of how they can change places for the better, and who in their "village" can help accomplish their goals. Coverage of their clean-up efforts in a local newspaper reinforced their value in the community. With the parent/engineer, students learned how land is measured and mapped for development. They learned about qualities of the site and its potentials through their role as clients to the University of Washington's landscape architecture students. This experience also gave them a view into the language and materials of site design, as they visited the studio and studied drawings and photos. Through their exposure to the budgeting and construction process, students will share in making the site come to life. Finally, as they enjoy the site on a daily basis, the children will continue to shape its features and observe its growth and changes.

SUMMARY

As John Dewey argued nearly a century ago, children need to learn from their environments. School environments play a significant role in a child's everyday life. Schools are taking on an even greater role in the extent of time a child spends there, as working parents place them in early morning and after-school programs. If those environments are sterile and isolated, there's little opportunity for children to sense their connection to the natural and social community around them.

Opportunities need to be created which will introduce and foster a child's attachment to the life of his or her community, or village. The place of village may be the schoolgrounds, a park, a garden, a natural area, a neighborhood, a downtown. In any definition, the child may interact with people of other ages and backgrounds, and with nature. By daily

experience, changes in the environment can be observed and familiarity with a place and its people can begin. Through inclusive processes, each of the case studies identifies alternative spaces and resources to expand children's school environments into the life of their village. The benefits of such initiatives include: educational enhancement.. appreciation for nature, ownership, and a sense of connection with community.

With Redmond Elementary School, a school district sought a partnership with a suburban city to save a treasured landmark, and share the surrounding site, to benefit the whole community. A process encouraging input from all facets of surroundings led to comprehensive masterplan options that will continue to evolve and change with educational and recreation needs. And, while the community may become part of the schoolgrounds, the schoolchildren may expand their learning out into the surrounding parkland, civic landmarks, and downtown like George Wood's example cited in the Introduction.

For Dearborn Elementary School a wooded lot is being added to Seattle's park system, and is being transformed as an outdoor classroom. The role of a non-profit land conservation organization to secure the once privately- owned land and take part in making the site safe, usable, and integral to the school children holds potential for other communities. Through the organization's partnership with the school and city Parks and Recreation Department, other resources assisted in this transformation. The children are learning about this valuable resource by studying and participating in its restoration. Over time, they may continue to steward and connect with this part of their community.

Normandy Park Academy Montessori School likewise is developing an outdoor classroom and needed spaces for play, but on privately-owned adjacent land, and with an emphasis on making the children integral to the process. The site, once a place for crime, is becoming a safe and engaging part of their community through the children's efforts and dreams. Parents, an immediate source for defining community in a child's life, also play an integral part in this transformation. The process is enriched through the involvement of other educational groups, such as the university and community college students. Additionally, support of local businesses may broaden connections with the surroundings.

In *Childhood's Future*, author Richard Louv states that "schools could increasingly serve as part of the child's extended family." The case studies illustrate the value of parents, grandparents, and other "siblings" in reconnecting school environments with their communities. The children participate in the process, gaining a greater understanding not only of their school site and community, but of their role in the life of that evolving "extended family". And through the process, the beneficiaries include not just the children, but the entire community.

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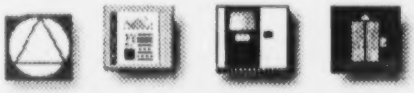

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